

Foreign Commitment Review

The impact of American troop commitments abroad upon foreign policy is certainly a fruitful field for inquiry. Members of Congress and others have shown increasing concern in recent years over the seeming modification of the United States' obligations abroad by the dispatch of troops to other lands. How far should this policy extend? Should it be left solely to the discretion of the President? At the moment the Senate Foreign Relations Committee has merely ordered a comprehensive review of the facts and the problems growing out of them. Behind the investigation, however, loom major questions as to how foreign policy shall be made.

The investigating subcommittee headed by Senator Symington will steer clear of Vietnam, not only because it is a special problem but also because of the delicate peace negotiations in Paris. Apparently there is no such immunity, however, for the strange U.S. commitment to Thailand, and

properly so. Thailand is the prime example of how the nature of foreign policy can be transformed by the dispatch of large numbers of American troops to a foreign land.

Under the Southeast Asia Treaty, the United States has an obligation to consult with other SEATO members if one of them should be attacked. Thailand, a member of SEATO. Aggression against Thailand would thus raise a grave question for the United States in any event, but, under the treaty, the country would not be obliged to respond militarily to the attack. Its treaty commitment goes no further than consultation with the other members, the best means of meeting a common danger.

But this view of the situation has been drastically changed in it by the building of immense bases in Thailand and the stationing of some 50,000 Americans in uniform there. In these circumstances, an attack on Thailand would almost inevitably involve military personnel, and in view of our extensive military cooperation with them the Thais would have good reason to expect American protection.

One of the facts that seems to worry the Foreign Relations Committee is that the dispatch of troops to Thailand, wholly at the discretion of the President, has thus changed the nature of the U.S. de facto commitment. Another troublesome fact is that the transformation was brought about by secret agreement with the Thais. The Senate's consent to commitments binding the United States to participation in the defense of another country thus seems to have been short-circuited.

At this point there is, of course, no indication as to what the Senate may wish to do about this and similar situations. The first step is to spread the facts on the record. But the Senate has an immediate and vital interest in determining the extent to which the military tail wags the foreign policy dog, and the country will be most interested in hearing what the Foreign Relations Committee proposes to do about it.